

# PRESS RELEASE

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## For Immediate Release

December 31, 2008

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### **FIRST GUILTY PLEA IN ST. CROIX TRIBAL DRUG INVESTIGATION**

Madison, Wisconsin -- Erik C. Peterson, United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin, announced that Joseph Merrill, 28, Siren, Wis., pleaded guilty yesterday in U.S. District Court in Madison to distributing approximately 18 grams of crack cocaine. Merrill faces a mandatory minimum penalty of five years in prison, and a maximum penalty of 40 years in prison, without parole. Chief Judge Barbara B. Crabb scheduled sentencing for February 27, 2009, at 1:20 p.m.

The government's proof at the guilty plea hearing established that an undercover Special Agent from the Wisconsin Department of Justice, working with a confidential informant, arranged to purchase crack cocaine from Manley Williams on September 9, 2006. Joseph Merrill drove Williams to the drug deal, which took place outside Trego, Wis., and the undercover agent purchased 18.5 grams of crack cocaine.

Co-defendant Manley Williams is scheduled for a jury trial in federal court beginning on March 2, 2009.

United States Attorney Peterson stated that today's guilty plea was the first

resulting from a long-term investigation being conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation-Narcotics Bureau; Federal Bureau of Investigation; St. Croix Tribal Police Department; Rice Lake Police Department; the Barron County Sheriff's Department; Burnett County Sheriff's Department; Polk County Sheriff's Department; and Wisconsin State Patrol. Peterson stated that the investigation is continuing and additional indictments and arrests are expected.

Prosecution of the cases is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney John W. Vaudreuil.

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